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## OUR ART CLUBS.

## III.—THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARTISTS.



CHARLES F. ULRICH.

The new movement, as it has been called, was a declaration of new ideas and new methods, neither more nor less, the ideas and the methods being those of the great European school in which its champions had graduated. The result of the new movement was the formation, during the summer after the spring exhibition of 1877, of the Society of American Artists.

In its constitution the new society commences with the declaration, "The name of this association shall be 'The Society of American Artists.' Its location the City of New York. Its object shall be the advancement of the Fine Arts." There is something magnificent in the far-reaching and chivalric quality of this simply framed declaration of principles. If the society has, for causes which are not a subject for discussion here, failed to achieve the end it might, it still did much towards it, and will, with judicious government and application of its latent powers, do much more. It has given us some fine and always interesting exhibitions, and no time was ever as ripe as the present for it to re-assess itself and resume the splendid work it set out to perform.

The first two exhibitions of the society were its best. In these it made a deep impression of technical advancement and executive power, and through them it commanded for its members such respect as is accorded by thoughtful men to men of new ideas. But the impression did not reach the general public, who understood but little of the aims and purposes of the band of young enthusiasts, and naturally sympathized but little with a phase of art that was above them. The society's displays were then, as they have been since, artistic successes, but not popular ones. This year the series was broken for the first time, no exhibition being given; but one is definitely promised for the coming season, and the indications are that the promise will be kept.

The roll call of the Society of American Artists is sufficient demonstration of the high quality of the art it champions. With figure painting and portraiture represented by such painters as Walter Shirlaw, Eastman Johnson, Wm. M. Chase, Frederick Dielman, Kenyon Cox, Gilbert Gaul, John La Farge, Will H. Low, Abbott H. Thayer, Charles F. Ulrich, F. W. Freer, Elihu Vedder, George de Forest Brush, F. S. Church, Edwin H. Blashfield, C. S. Reinhart, W. T. Smedley, C. Y. Turner, Thomas Hovenden, E. A. Abbey, J. Carroll Beckwith, T. W. Dewing, Frederick P. Vin-

ton, Frank Duveneck, John S. Sargent, Thomas Eakins, George W. Maynard, Douglas Volk, Frank D. Millet and Wm. Dannat, among others, there is not a modern school or a modern inspiration in art which does not find expression in the ranks of the association. When we turn to landscape, we find its claims upheld by such exponents as H. Bolton Jones, Walter L. Palmer, Bruce Crane, Charles Melville Dewey, R. C. Minor, W. L. Picknell, John N. Twachtman, Charles H. Miller, R. Swain Gifford, Homer D. Martin, A. H. Wyant, D. W. Tryon and J. Francis Murphy. The brothers St. Gaudens, Theodore Bauer, Olin L. Warner and W. R. O'Donovan represent the plastic art in its councils. Arthur Quartley, Wm. Gedney Bunce, Francis C. Jones, Birge Harrison, Francis Lathrop, William Sartain, Louis C. Tiffany, Theodore Robinson and J. H. Niemeyer are among the other names of approved merit on its list which we just now recall. If memory serves us faithfully, there are four ladies in the society—Rosina Emmet, Mary Cassatt, Helena De Kay Gilder and Sarah W. Whitman.

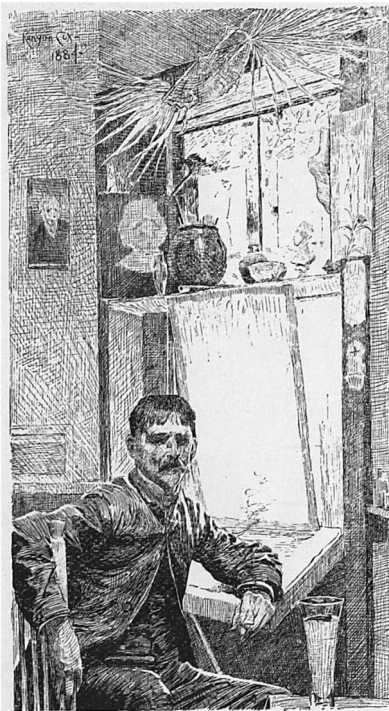
## JONES' MASTERPIECES.

HE was certainly an extraordinary fellow, a man of great talent and of equal ability, but undecided, weak-willed and absolutely without reliance on himself. But how could it have been otherwise? A life spent in art schools and studios is not likely to make the liver of it a man for emergencies or energetic deeds.

For two years he had not painted a picture, but he had been painting on one all that time. He had commenced it on a panel as big as the top of a table, cut it in half and made a recommencement on each moiety, only to divide them and cover each of the reduced planes with the same experiment. Instead of one large panel, he, at the end of two years, had eight small ones, all in about the same condition of completion and equally unsatisfactory to him.

"I don't know what it is," he used to say, "but there's something about that central figure I don't like, and that window is not what it ought to be, I'll swear."

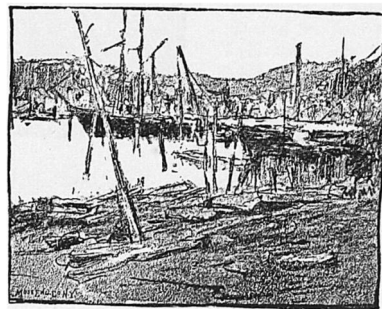
If any professional critic had got sight of his work and criticised it half as mercilessly as he did, I believe he would have murdered him. But he continued tearing himself to pieces, subsisting by painting figures and ornaments on sign boards, locking himself up for days together whenever he had secured sufficient money to hire models, but coming no nearer the end of his work after all. It was in vain that we argued with him, in vain we swore the least complete of his pictures was superior to half the finished works exhibited. They did not suit him, and he pendulated steadily between hopefulness and what he proposed to do when he had made his



KENYON COX.

despair, to-day telling you hit, to-morrow threatening to pistol himself. The affair would have been ridiculous if he had not been a good fellow as well as a foolish one. As it was, we were uneasily suspicious that he might some day carry his threat out, and sacrifice his life as well as his labor to his unrealized ideal.

At last he walked into the studio of his neighbor, Smeere, one afternoon, and after the



J. ALDEN WEIR.

exchange of the usual greetings, he announced abruptly that he was going away.

"Where to?" demanded Smeere.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Well, upon my word," said Smeere, laying his palette aside, "this is your crowning lunacy! What do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I say, old man," was the grave reply. "I have notified the landlord, and my month is up on Saturday. I want you to store my traps in your back room until I get back."

"But what the deuce are you going away for?"

"To learn to paint my picture. The more I work on it, the more I am convinced that I have not had sufficient experience in life yet to carry such a subject out; so I am going to hunt for the experience. Oh! you need not be afraid. I know what I'm about, and you'll say so when I get back."

Smeere tried to argue with him, but the discussion always gravitated to the same point. He had made up his mind and was going away. He had raised a little money painting a lot of Christmas signs of an unusually gorgeous and expensive character. When that ran out, he could earn more somehow, he was sure; but he was going to remain away until he felt himself strong enough for his great work. Upon that his resolution was inflexible. Exactly how his scheme was going to further the coveted end he could not say; but in a vague way he recognized the fact that he had been living too much in his studio, and that to paint a picture which would interest the world he must move in and acquire some sympathy with the world itself. Smeere, who was by no means a modest studio bird himself, admitted that there was a certain force in the argument, and after a supper of chops and old Burton at the Knickerbocker, wound up by endorsing his friend's decision.

But where was he to wander to? Personally, he seemed to possess neither an idea or a preference on this point; so, over their fifth pewter of

Burton they concluded to leave the decision to that useful compilation, the "Traveler's Guide." It opened, at random, at a list of vessels sailing between New York and South America, and a blind shot with Jones' pencil made a target of the following:

"For San Francisco, ship 'Three Sisters.' Pier 14, East River."

"That's a nice way to commence to make the acquaintance of the world!" observed Smeere. "Four months on a packet ship! Why not try a trip around the globe?"

But his friend accepted the decision of the shipping list seriously. Next day found him at Pier 14, East River, and when the "Three Sisters" sailed forty-eight hours later, the pilgrim of art nestled in their collective bosom. Smeere packed the wanderer's belongings away in his spare room, and the studio was let to a landscape painter who finished half a dozen canvases a week for the auction rooms.

Smeere could not paint. Viewed from an artistic standpoint, he was as dead a failure as a spoiled mummy. But he was a good fellow, had the knack of turning out pleasing trifles with a facile hand, and was one of the most prosperous painters in New York. He knew every one, went everywhere, and gave the most unconventional and rollicking entertainments in his studio. It was said of him that he never gave a party, made a call, or even met a man outside of the profession in the street without getting rid of a picture. This was an exaggeration, of course; but his *bonhomie* and his large social connections did open an extensive and profitable market for him,

and people who would never have dreamed of buying pictures for their own sakes, bought them for his.

A couple of weeks after Jones had started on his search for inspiration, Smeere issued invitations for one of his studio parties. He decorated his room for the occasion, and finding that one of Jones' eight panels fitted an empty frame of his, he put it in it, and added it to the adornments of his walls, by way of lending them variety. "The fool," he thought, as he



F. W. FREER.

looked at it; "if I could paint like that, you wouldn't catch me turning tramp."

In the course of the evening, when the pipes and beer had mellowed the company into coziness, one of Smeere's guests remarked to him:

"What do you want for that little thing there?"

"Which one?" demanded Smeere, following with his eyes the direction of his guest's pipe stem.

"That in the bronze frame."

There were two bronze frames, one encircling a marine of Smeere's, and the other holding Jones' panel. They had been hung side by side to form a centre. Smeere gave the price for his picture.

"I'll take it," said his friend, "and as it's so small, I'll carry it home with me. I might as well give you a check now, if you will let me have pen and ink."

Smeere was a business man, and never missed clinching a bargain. He provided the required materials for the creation of solvent commercial paper without delay, and his guest carried one of the pictures in the bronze frames home with him when the party broke up in deference to the dawn. But it was Jones' panel, not the marine by the genial host himself.

When Smeere discovered his mistake—for he was certain it could not be his guest's—he was in a quandary. He did not know whether to recall the bargain, or to let the matter rest as it stood. Finally, he decided on the latter course. The price paid for the panel was a substantial one, for Smeere's own pictures stood high in the market, however low they averaged in the scale of art. "It's as much as Jonesy could get himself," he thought, "if he had the biggest kind of luck; and I'll lay my head that he'll need money before he gets through."

A few days later he came upon the following in the art notes of *The Herald*:

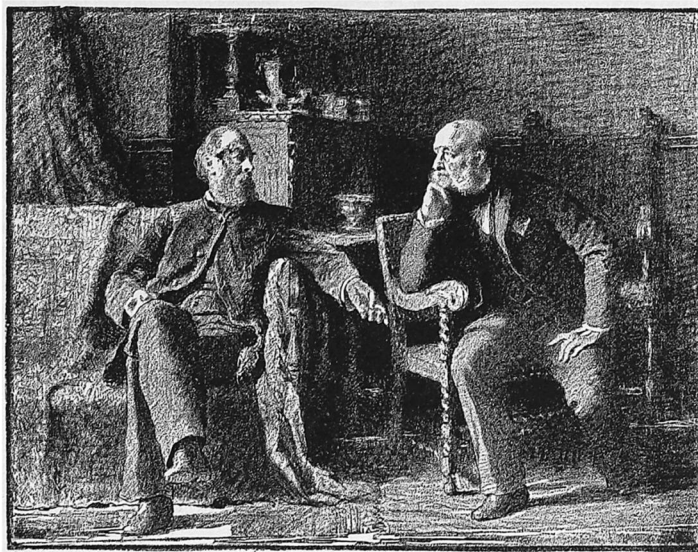
"The Hon. Samuel Boggs, the well known connoisseur, has added to his collection a charming little picture by a name known only to those familiar with our studios, that of Ernest Jones. Mr. Jones is one of our younger artists, whose pictures are rarely seen in the exhibitions. This is said to be due to the fact that they are all disposed of at private sale. In view of the



C. Y. TURNER.



J. CARROLL BECKWITH.



EASTMAN JOHNSON.

quality of the example in Mr. Boggs' possession, this is no wonder. It is——" here followed a graphic and enthusiastic description of the picture and the critic's verdict that it took rank among "the first productions our art had given existence to."

Smeere dropped the paper with a whistle of amazement. Then he began to rub his chin and grin. It was too absurd. The picture poor Jones had run away from a masterpiece! But after all, why not?

He got out another of the panels—one in about the same state of advancement as that which the Hon. Samuel Boggs had become the owner of—and studied it. Beyond a doubt it was a stunning picture. Its very incompleteness made it masterly. There was nothing feeble or uncertain about it. Jones had not worked on it long enough to elaborate the spirit out of it. "By Jove!" said Smeere to himself, as, having set it on his easel, he stretched out in his arm-chair and examined it. "What a fool Jonesy is, to be sure!"

The words were scarcely uttered when some one knocked. It was the Hon. Samuel Boggs, and when he saw the picture he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Smeere began to feel uneasy, and wonder if he would want the check back.

"Well, this is remarkable!" said the Hon. Samuel Boggs. "Upon my soul, it is!"

"What?" demanded Smeere.

"Do you know what brought me here?" asked his visitor. "It was to see if I couldn't get that picture of mine duplicated. Where did that one come from?"

"It was the first one Jones painted," responded Smeere, rising to the situation with his usual promptness. "He didn't like it, so he started the other. Between you and me, yours is the better picture. It has a certain quality this one lacks. But this is a beauty all the same."

The Hon. Samuel Boggs examined the panel critically. It was, practically, the duplicate of the one he had, but Smeere's artful disparagement of it had given his own a superior value he was not slow to recognize. Having made sure of him in this way, Smeere asked him what he wanted another picture for.

"It's for General Jag-

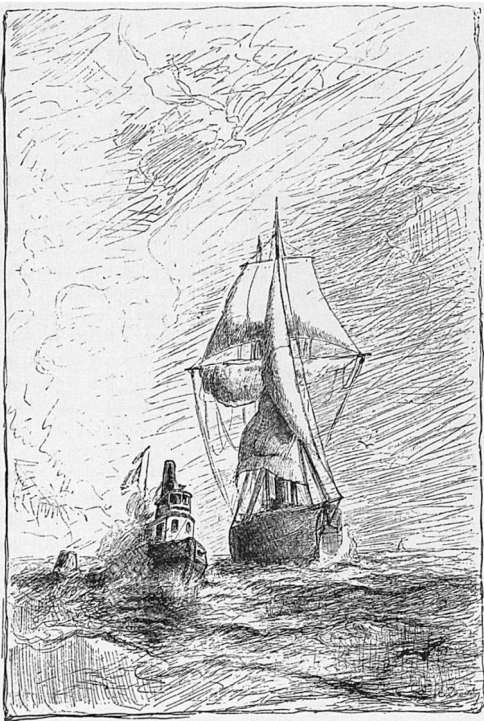




DOUGLAS VOLK.

gers," said Mr. Boggs. "You know General Ransom B. Jaggers, of the Mining Board. He took a fancy to my picture and wanted it. So do I. But he has done me favors—let me in on the ground floor of two good things—and I'd like to oblige him. So I thought I'd see if the artist couldn't paint me a—a—oh, what do you call it?"

"A replica?" said Smeere. "Yes. Well, Jones's in California now, working up material for a historical picture—and



ARTHUR QUARTLEY.

it will be a great one, mark my words. But if you want to oblige your friend, you can have this picture, if you think it will suit."

It would suit, and the Hon. Samuel Boggs left another check and carried the duplicate of his bargain away with him.

The next time one of his critical friends dined with him—for Mr. Boggs was a collector in a small way, and cultivated the critics—he informed him, casually, that young Jones, whose picture he had lately bought, was in California making studies for a great historical work. General Jaggers, who was of the party, and whose acquisition of the second panel had inspired him with a sort of proprietary interest in the painter, added that he was going to buy that work and present it to the Forty-nine Club. Thus, by a natural process of development, the critic announced in his paper that Mr. Ernest Jones, the young and powerful American painter, had gone to California to execute a historical masterpiece for the millionaire mining magnate, General Ransom B. Jaggers. So, within a month after the accidental sale of his unfinished picture, Jones was a popular painter, and there was a demand for his works.

Smeere, as I have said, was a shrewd business man. When the call for his friend's pictures began, he lost no time deliberating over what he should do. "If Jonesy doesn't like it," he said to himself, "he will make just as big a row over those two I have already sold as over the whole lot. I'll make a clean sweep for him, if I can."

So he raked over Jones' stock, first packing the six remaining panels of the Hon. Samuel Boggs' subject away, for he dared not risk selling any more of them. There were a dozen pictures, all good in subject and excellent in execution, which the self-critical painter had set aside as unsatisfactory. There were also a score or more of studies and sketches



GILBERT GAUL.

of the more complete kind. Smeere cleaned them all up, and opened for business as the self-constituted agent of his absent friend. Long before Jones could possibly have reached California, the productions he set so little esteem on had found purchasers, and Smeere was the custodian of more money of his than he had ever dreamed of owning in one sum.

Six months passed, and brought no word of the man who had become famous without knowing it. Smeere had addressed a dozen letters to him at the San Francisco post-office, and had employed a lawyer there to institute a search for him, when the merchant to whom the "Three Sisters" belonged, and of whom he had also sought for information, notified him that the ship had been lost on the Chiloe Islands, all hands going down with her, as far as was known. It was the true irony of Fate—to make a man's fortune while removing him from the power of its enjoyment.

Having settled to the conviction that his friend had ceased to be such, in substantial form, at least, it was no wonder that Smeere experienced a shock when the post brought him a letter, in a dirty envelope covered with shabby stamps, which I here give:

"My Dear Old Boy:

"VALPARAISO, Nov. 10th, 187—.

"To commence with—for the love of heaven or anything else worth loving, send me a couple of hundred dollars to get away from this hole with.

"I have been here three months, and it seems three centuries. It took me three months to get here from the infernal gulls' nest we were wrecked on. It took me two months and seventeen days to get there and be wrecked. There you have the whole record of my time since I left New York.

"I am playing the fiddle in a café on the Calle Santa Isabel, and making lightning caricatures

on a blackboard, for a living, or rather for a dying—for I am perishing of *ennui*. This is a great country—for the natives and for foreign shopkeepers, but their patron saint preserve the artists safe at home.

"By the way, have we a patron saint? If we have, he must have been out with me when he sent me here.

"But send me that money. Sell anything, everything I left, if you can sell it. The best of those panels ought to bring something. Lord bless those panels! I'll make firewood of them if I'm ever lucky enough to get within splitting distance.

"More by the next mail, if nature endures the strain till then, from

"Yours, JONES."

A year after his abrupt and eccentric departure from New York, Jones walked into his friend's studio without the formality of rapping and with a lady on his arm. He wore a beard which would have been a credit to a pirate, and his appearance certainly did not suggest that he had undergone a serious siege of privation. "Mrs. Jones," he said, "this is my friend, Smeere, to whom we owe our passage tickets. Mrs. J. hasn't mastered our great and glorious tongue yet, old man, but she is doing her best in the grapple with it; and now," interrupting Smeere at the commencement of a speech, "don't tell me I'm a fool, for I know it; don't tell me I ought to be shot, for I deny it; don't tell me I'll starve, for I won't. The world owes Mrs. J. and me a living, and we're going to have it, if we take to the highway with revolvers and black masks. All I want of you, just now, is the loan of fifty dollars, for we've got to find a boarding-house before night."

Mrs. Jones, who had been listening to this, to her, unintelligible oration,



THOMAS HOVENDEN.

with a smile of helpless amiability on her pretty, dark face, managed to support her husband when he staggered back at the response his friend made. Having divided his embraces between Smeere and Mrs. Jones until both were upon the verge of suffocation, Jones demanded—

"But why didn't you tell me this in your letter?"

"Because I wanted to surprise you," replied Smeere. "It is tit for tat, for you have certainly astonished me."

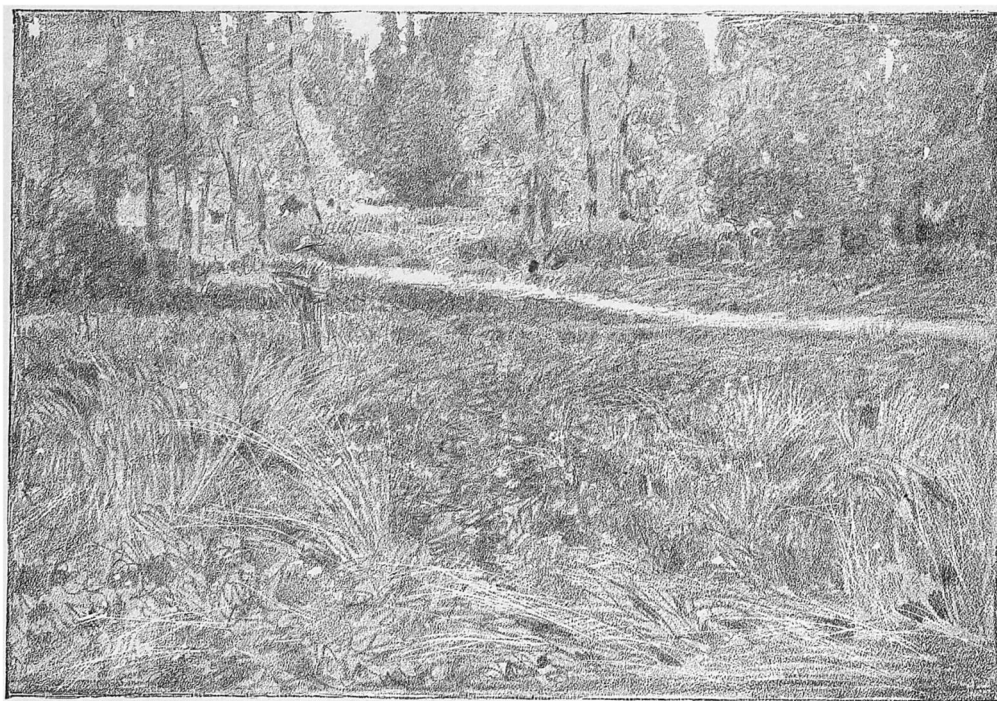
"By introducing you to Mrs. J., eh?"

"No. By introducing me to a new man."

Jones is now called the most energetic and practical man of business among the painters of New York. He paints better than ever, and he wastes no time on his pictures, but he cannot paint them rapidly enough for his market; and, though he has executed many better ones since, he still regards the two examples in the collections of the Hon. Samuel Briggs and General Ransom B. Jaggars as his masterpieces.

A. T.

MR. WHISTLER is to honor us with a lecturing tour this winter. He will also honor us with an exhibition of his works. Mr. Whistler's local exhibition of etchings a year ago was not conspicuously successful in the commercial sense, but his exhibition of himself will, undoubtedly, pay him and his manager. It is a significant and appropriate coincidence that the same manager who jockeyed Oscar Wilde through the United States will perform that service for his artistic prototype.



G. RUGER DONOHO.